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ABSTRACT

The language of East Germany has undergone distinct semantic change since the arrival of the Soviet occupation forces in 1945, especially in the areas of politics, philosophy, and social organization. This is evident in governmental publications and in the shortwave transmissions of the official broadcasting station. Four sources of the change can be determined: the influence of classical Marxism and socialism, the influence of Leninism and later developments in Marxist-Leninist theory, the influence of Russian terminology as developed in the Soviet Union, and the influence of governmental and party institutions. Almost all of the change in East Germany has been based upon state philosophy. The most frequent type of change is a narrowing of semantic field accompanied by a considerable increase in frequency of usage. Different terms may, thus, be applied to overtly similar acts performed by socially and philosophically opposed groups. (VM)

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Semantic Change in the German of East Germany

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The language of East Germany has undergone a remarkable rapid transformation since the collapse of the Third Reich and the arrival of Soviet occupation forces in 1945. While the phonetics and the an overwhelming extent the syntax of the standard language have remained unchanged, significant changes have occurred in the vocabulary. The may be grouped under the following headings:

1) creation of new lexical items
2) loss or decline of old lexical items
3) changes in word frequency
4) semantic change.

The last of the above headings, semantic change, is the topic of the present study, although heading 3) is frequently of direct relevance.

The most practical approach to the highly complex topic of semantic change is to attempt to define the nature of the change in terms of

1) quantitative change
   a) broadening of the semantic field
   b) narrowing of the semantic field
2) qualitative change
   a) partial change of the semantic field
   b) total change of the semantic field.

The present study is confined to the official standard language of East Germany, as found in such governmental publications of the DDR as the SED newspaper Neues Deutschland, the photograph album Deutsche Demokratische Republik[1], and for the spoken official language, the shortwave transmissions of the official broadcasting station, Radio Berlin International. Western sources such as SBZ von A bis Z[2] were also used. No attempt can here be made to gauge the measure of acceptance or rejection of official linguistic norms by the average DDR citizen. Moser, in his excellent study[3], speaks of a degree, albeit declining, of Bilingualism among non-party members in East Germany, with close adherence to the official standard in conversation with functionaries and party members, but a divergence from the norm in family and apolitical settings.

While the many linguistically reflected social changes occurring in contemporary West Germany are largely of a non-political, non-governmental nature, almost all linguistic change in East Germany is the direct consequence of overt governmental

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policy based upon an official state philosophy. The changes are, therefore, relatively easy to determine, to define and to categorize. The sources of semantic change, while closely related and at times indistinguishable, may generally be distinguished as

1) influence of classical Marxism and socialism

2) influence of Leninism and later developments of Marxist-Leninist theory

3) influence of Russian terminology as developed in the Soviet Union

4) influence of governmental and party institutions as developed in the DDR.

Let us examine these in that order.

1) Semantic change induced by classical Marxism and Socialism.

Classical Marxism, being based upon the Hegelian dialectic, is a philosophy of oppositions. Many terms, then, may be defined by contrasting them with their dialectical opposites. Such an approach may lead to startlingly different definitions from those current in the West. What, for example, is the opposite of Volk? The Marxist meaning of the term Volk may only be understood after this question has been posed. Again, the adjective neu takes on partisan connotations; the aim of socialism in the DDR is to produce den neuen, sozialistischen Mensch. Dialectically, then, the antonym of neu, alt, assumes distinctly negative connotations. The prime exponent of das Neue is der Neuerer, a much-lauded participant in the East German Produktionskampf. The term Neuerer has narrowed in semantic range while increasing greatly in frequency of use. The terms das Neue and das Alte, in the language of leaders and functionaries, must be understood dialectically; das Alte is the summa of all that is outmoded and clearly destined, dialectically, for the scrapheap of history; while das Neue is the historically inevitable, synonymous, indeed, with das Unaufhaltsame, another term which has narrowed in meaning - referring only to that which is inevitable from the viewpoint of the Marxist historian - while gaining far greater currency in East German official usage than in the West.

Let us examine some further examples of words which have been redefined from a Hegelian viewpoint. Atheismus and atheistisch, for example, although originally negatives, may be defined dialectically as the opposite of Religion and religiös and are, consequently, used in a positive sense. Entwicklung is an historically determined, inevitable process dialectically opposed to stagnation or to ständige Verelendung under capitalism. It is therefore positive, but at the same time it

is narrower in its field of reference, as it cannot be used to refer to developments which run counter to the Marxist concept of Fortschritt; Entwicklung, for example, is not possible under capitalism. The adjective fortschrittlich may be applied to anyone who does not oppose Marxist Entwicklung and Aufbau, and is frequently applied to Westerners sympathetic to the Communist cause. Handlung and Tat, which in non-Marxist-Leninist usage require further definition, any may be for good or ill, are used to refer only to acts in accordance with Marxist historical inevitability, or to Leninist principles of the leadership of the Party in hastening inevitable historical processes. Thus, Handlung and Tat, as well as Aktion, may often be used absolutely, without a descriptive adjective, and all Handlungen, Taten and Aktionen are ipso facto positive.

Another term with a strict Marxian definition almost startlingly opposed to that current in the West is Agitation. To the Westerner, Agitation is a negative term with distinctly unpleasant implications. To the Communist, however, Agitation is a technical term clearly opposed to the related, but distinct, exercise of Propaganda. While Propaganda is the Erziehung of Kader, the explanation of party line and governmental policy, with the necessary theoretical justification, Agitation is the prime form of Massenarbeit, where a few slogans are endlessly repeated and practical attempts at persuasion, unhampered by theoretical considerations, are undertaken by the dedicated Agitator who has himself first been subjected to the training of Propaganda. One who performs his duties to the socialist state in this field, and also in the field of sozialistischer Aufbau, is described as aktiv. Only in this precise way may the adjective aktiv be understood[4]; in East Germany, the only fields in which an individual may be aktiv are party and productive work. The noun Aktivität is similarly circumscribed in reference. Aktiv and its compounds, therefore, have moved from neutrality to the ranks of positive terms charged with strong ideological and partisan content. A similar semantic movement has occurred in Aktion, Arbeiter, Aufbau, Aufgabe, bereit, Bewegung, Brigade, Durchbruch, Entwicklung, erreichen, Errungenschaft, festigen, Handlung, hinausführen, historisch, Hoffnung, Humanismus, Humanität, Initiative, Jugend, Kampf, Kollektiv, Kultur, Leben, lenken, Massen, Materialismus, Meilenstein, Menschlichkeit, Moral, Norm, Objekt, Ordnung, Organisator, Patriot, Pionier, Prozess, Rekonstruktion, Sittlichkeit, Soll, Sozialismus, sozialistisch, spontan, Staat, stärken, stürmisch, Tat, Technik, Treue, übertreffen, überwinden, verändern, Veränderung, Volk, Vollendung, vorwärts, Weg, Wegweiser, werktätig, Willen, Wissenschaft, Ziel.

The Marxist definitions of the above may be found in the Leipzig edition of Duden[5], while those of non-German origin may also be found in the Fremdwörterbuch[6], which Riemschneider[7] feels to be more specifically Marxist in its semantic approach. The process of redefinition, as illustrated by the sequence of definitions as found in successive editions of the same reference work, has been ably demonstrated by Moser[8] and Riemschneider[9].

In many of the above examples, the new East German meaning is obvious. Others, however, require specific definition. Hoffnung, for example, is only hope for such fortschrittlich, sozialistisch aims as Planerfüllung, Aufbau, Friede, Liquidierung des Kapitalismus, etc. Hopes not in accordance with Marxist-Leninist principles are not Hoffnungen, but Revanchismus, Militarismus or Antisozialismus and express themselves in such deeds as Abwerbung, Republikflucht or Sabotage.

When a hitherto neutral term becomes positive and partisan in connotation, a negative equivalent is required; logic and the dialectic dictate this. Just as socialist hopes and capitalistic hopes are of entirely different natures and can no longer be expressed by the same term Hoffnung, so too a refugee from capitalism is denoted by the positive term Flüchtling while the refugee who leaves the DDR to go to the capitalist West is guilty of the crime of Republikflucht and placed in the criminal category of Republikflüchtige. Since Aktivität, Aktion, Handlung and Tat all have positive connotations, a negative equivalent must be sought; this is the crime against socialism of blosse Betriebsamkeit[10]. Since the Propagandist and Agitator speak only in favor of the socialist state, the speaker of opposition must be a Hetzer, guilty of Blasphemie, a term still largely religious in its connotations in West Germany but secularized in the East.

2) Semantic change induced by post-Marxian, Leninist theory and practice.

It is impossible to understand the terminology, for example, of a theoretical article in Neues Deutschland or of a speech by Walter Ulbricht on the basis of a study of pure, classical Marxism alone. Many Leninist concepts have been introduced, especiallyiin the field of party organization and in the societal role of the Party. The concept of Lenkung, of the leading position of the Kader, of the personal role of the Neuerer in furthering the Erziehung of the Massen, and of the state-initiated Bewegung, may be interpreted only from a post-Marxian, Leninist viewpoint and, indeed, only after practical observation of the structure of the one-party state.

Other terms which may best be understood by the student of practical Leninism

are führen, Führung, Funktionär, Gerechtigkeit,(especially in the familiar combination sozialistische Gerechtigkeit), Kultur, Lager "political camp, bloc", Liquidierung, Masseninitiative, Sektierertum, Staatswillen, Überbau, volkseigen, Volkseigentum, and many terms of social organization such as Gewerkschaft, where the standard German word has been retained but redefined in Leninist terms. This contrasts with Russian practice, where an entirely new term for the state-controlled union, profsoyuz, an acronym for professional'ny soyuz, has been developed, and may be dialectically opposed to the bourgeois trade-union, for which the English term, treyd-yun'on, is used.

Not specifically Leninist, but typical of a compromise with classic Marxist theory in practical economics and in the practical circumstances of a gradual, rather than immediate, state takeover of the means of production, are such non-Marxist terms as halbstaatlich.

3) Semantic change induced by Soviet Russian terminology.

Walter Ulbricht and others among the older leadership of the state and the SED spent many years in exile in the Soviet Union; many of them are fluent in Russian. The influence of Russian terms of Marxist philosophy and economics and Marxist-Leninist state organization is chiefly in the field of semantics, rather than in syntax or morphemics, as most of the terms concerned are Fremdwörter in both languages. The semantic Angleichung of many words to their Russian cognates or equivalents may be viewed as a function of a common socio-economic philosophy working in both cases, rather than a function of the Russian language an sich, although there is, in fact, a small group of Russian calques of considerable linguistic interest, but which, as neologisms in German, rather than semantic variants of existing words, fall outside the scope of the present study.

In addition to numerous theoretical terms semantically influenced by Soviet Russian, such as Humanismus, Militarismus, Revanchismus, many terms of practical state organization such as Kombinat, Kombine, Organisator and Brigade are found in senses identical with those of their Russian cognates. This is true even in such manifestations of state-controlled leisure as Festival, Estradenkonzert and the typical word-combination frohe Ferien; Estradenkonzert is a calque of Russ. èstradyy kontsert; even in recreation, then, there is no escape from the political partisanship of language. Konferenz has been broadened to cover the same semantic field as konferentsiya, Kultur is now identical with kul'tura, the Kulturhaus in the East German village plays the role of the dom kul'tury in the Soviet village, and Pionier, once largely a military term, refers to the junior branch of the FDJ youth movement, parallel with the pion'er of the Soviet

Komsomol. The adjective verdient is now precise and circumscribed in usage, being found only in such official titles of honor as Verdienter Künstler der DDR, corresponding precisely to Russ. zaslužnyy artist SSSR.

4) Semantic change induced by institutional development in the DDR.

Numerous terms showing semantic change in current use may be understood only on the basis of a knowledge of the practical shape of governmental and social institutions in contemporary East Germany. To a certain extent, Marxism in Germany has developed its own terminology, originating with Karl Marx but building, not through Lenin, but through Liebknecht, Luxemburg and Thälmann; in his study, Riemschneider[11] attempts to show to what extent the current official language of the DDR is an authentically German, rather than a Leninist-Soviet, mold. The great majority of semantic changes under this heading are, however, based upon experience and practice since the establishment of the state in 1949 and the collectivization of agriculture and nationalization of the economy.

The term landwirtschaftliche Produktionsgenossenschaft, for example, commonly abbreviated to LPG, while each of its constituent units may be defined according to Marxian politico-economic theory, can only be understood in practice on the basis of the economic structure of the DDR. Of linguistic interest, also, is the fact that, whereas in the West such an economic institution would normally be referred to with the overtly foreign, Soviet Russian term kolchos, kolchose, a term composed of indigenous German linguistic material was developed in the DDR, and the use of the Russian term to refer to the East German institution is frowned upon.

Again, in the term Volkskammer "People's Parliament", while the word Volk has a Marxist definition, an understanding of the choice of the word Kammer must be predicated upon the realization that, for the Marxist-Leninist, the term Parlament has bourgeois connotations; a "neutral" (and, incidentally, non-Soviet) term, Kammer, was found; it plays no role in classical Marxism, but in the framework of East German governmental organization it has taken on a specific practical connotation and distinctly partisan overtones; its semantic field may be said, then, to have narrowed (become more specific) and shifted (become partisan in nature).

The term parteilos may only be understood in the context of East German party political structure. Five parties exist, the SED and four nominally independent minor parties linked with the SED and the mass organizations through common membership in the Nationale Front, and any non-member is automatically designated parteilos - a calque of Russ. bezpartijnyy; in the Soviet Union, however, the CPSU is the only party.

The negative term Frontstadt applied to West Berlin is a product of a particular geopolitical situation, as viewed in terms of the Marxist theory of inevitable conflict between Communism and capitalism. Likewise, the tendentious terms Atomkanzler(applied to West German chancellors, especially Adenauer), Revanchismus, Revanchist, and many others have arisen only through the practical identification of an arch-enemy, West Germany, symbolic of the broader enemy, capitalism, in the East German situation. These terms cannot be understood through pure Marxism alone. It is noteworthy that the prefix Atom-, in such compounds as Atomkanzler, Atomgeneral, Atompolitiker, has acquired negative overtones which it lacks in the West, or is used in compounds seldom or never found in the West.

One word which has undergone a very considerable semantic, and indeed syntactic, change specifically in East Germany, is Freundschaft. Used in slogans and particularly associated with the FDJ youth movement, Freundschaft is equivalent to Russ. družba. But going beyond this, while still retaining its original abstract meaning, Freundschaft has become a collective term for a unit of FDJ members, corresponding, for example, to a troop of Western Boy Scouts. The collective unit of Pioniere at a particular school or camp is the Pionierfreundschaft. This development goes well beyond that of Russ. družba and is similar to such English collectives as a pride of lions, where an abstract characteristic of the animal has become a collective noun denoting its social unit.

Just as a single term can no longer be applied to the same overt act when performed by a socialist, on the one hand, and by a capitalist, on the other, so, too, a different term is used for the frontiers of the DDR bordering upon capitalist West Germany, on the one hand, and on the sozialistische Bruderländer, especially Poland, on the other hand. The border with West Germany is the Staatsgrenze, while that with Poland is the Friedensgrenze, since only between socialist neighbors is Marxistically defined Friede possible; this, too, is a specifically East German terminological development.

Conclusion.

In conclusion, then, it may be said that the vocabulary of German in the spheres of politics, philosophy, social organization and related fields has undergone semantic changes, not on a random basis, but firmly based upon a state philosophy. The most frequent change has been demonstrated to be a narrowing of the semantic field, generally accompanied by a considerable increase in frequency of usage of the lexical item concerned. Different terms are frequently applied to overtly similar acts performed by, or emotions felt by, socially and philosophically opposing groups; while many hitherto neutral terms have been charged with parti pris, whether positive or negative.

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Notes

[1] Horst Hering, ed., Deutsche Demokratische Republik(Leipzig: Edition Leipzig, 6., neu bearb. Aufl., 1966).

[2] Bundesministerium für gesamtdeutsche Fragen(later: für innerdeutsche Fragen), ed., SBZ von A bis Z(Bonn: Deutscher Bundesverlag, 1953 and subsequent editions).

[3] Hugo Moser, Sprachliche Folgen der politischen Teilung Deutschlands(Beihefte zum Wirkenden Wort, no. 3, Düsseldorf: Pädagogischer Verlag Schwann, 1. Aufl., 1962), pp. 46–47.

[4] The traditional German adjective aktiv, here discussed, is not to be confused with the East German noun das Aktiv "collective work group", a Russian loan-word which, as a neologism, falls outside the scope of the present study.

[5] Horst Klien, ed., Der grosse Duden - Wörterbuch und Leitfaden der deutschen Rechtschreibung(Leipzig: VEB Bibliographisches Institut, various editions).

[6] Horst Klien, ed., Fremdwörterbuch(Leipzig: VEB Verlag Enzyklopädie, 1961).

[7] Ernst G. Riemschneider, Veränderungen der deutschen Sprache in der sowjetisch besetzten Zone Deutschlands seit 1945(Düsseldorf: Pädagogischer Verlag Schwann, 1. Aufl., 1963).

[8] op. cit., pp. 23-31.

[9] op. cit., passim.

[10] Contrast, however, the greater frequency of occurrence of the simplex Betrieb, used to refer to all state-owned or semi-state enterprises where normal Western usage would be Gesellschaft, Konzern, etc.

[11] op. cit., p. 9.

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